AND THERE CAME A DAY, A DAY UNLIKE ANY OTHER. WHEN HEROES FROM ACROSS THE MULTIVERSE WERE CALLED TOGETHER TO DEFEAT A FOE THAT NO SINGLE DIMENSION COULD WITHSTAND. ON THAT DAY, AN ALL-NEW, AND ALL-DIFFERENT E.G.G WAS BORN.

-Episode 2-

Journey to the Spire

“Ahhhhhhhh!!!!!” Charlie screamed, as he ran through the thorns on the ground, the large, black lizard creature chasing after him.

“Charlie, you need to find cover!” Portal said into his earpiece. “Without your dimensional coordinates I have no way to port you out of there!”

“Yeah, I got that!” Charlie yelled, breaking left as the lizard did so as well. “I can’t shake this thing!”

“Blaaaarrrrgh!” The lizard hissed, spewing acid from its mouth and barely missing Charlie.

“It has acid spit! I’m gonna die!”

“Run faster!” Portal suggested.

“Gee, thanks! I didn’t think of that!” Charlie sarcastically replied. The lizard spit acid once more and it hit the ground in front of Charlie, causing it to melt and him to slip.

“Raaaahhh!” It roared, raising its claws.

“No! NO!” Charlie prepared for the worst, when suddenly it was hit with a Repulsor blast. Just then, from above the thorns, Julian and Leviathan slid in on an ice path Leviathan was creating. Julian fired off a few more shots of his Repulsor Blaster.

“Get some lizard breath!” He shouted.

“Reeee!” The lizard screeched.

“Can’t do this foreveeeaaaaahhhh!” Leviathan screamed as his ice gave out and he and Julian plummeted.

“Come on man!” Julian exclaimed. He caught hold of a thorn and Leviathan crashed into another one, tumbling to the ground. The lizard roared and charged at them.

“Now that he’s distracted…” Charlie activated a holographic screen on his wrist. He selected taser blast, his wrist charged up, and he fired an electric bolt at the lizard.

“Grrraaahhhh!” It hissed. Having taken too much damage, it slithered away into the thorns. Julian dropped to the ground and held his hand out to Leviathan.

“You good bro?” He asked.

“Yeah, no, I uh… I think I’ll just lay here for a while.” Leviathan replied.

“Come on, up and at ‘em.” Charlie said, as they pulled him up. “You guys need to sync up, Portal can’t reach you.”

Julian and Leviathan tapped their earpieces.

“Hello?” Portal asked. “Can you hear me.”

“Loud and clear Collins.” Julian replied.

“Excellent. Is Cortexia with you guys?”

“Unfortunately not.” Leviathan replied. “And worse than that, Blackout’s got her.”

“Shock it all…” Charlie swore.

“Well it ain’t all bad.” Julian compromised. “He doesn’t have his spear, and his armor’s busted up. Also there’s three of us.”

“But he’s got Cortexia,” Charlie said. “That gives him all the leverage he needs.”

“Then we can’t let him see us coming.” Leviathan said. “I know a little bit about sneaking, courtesy of…”

“Let me guess? The Black Panther.” Julian interrupted. Leviathan sheepishly rubbed the back of his neck.

“How many times have I mentioned I’ve been trained by him?”

“Enough.” Charlie replied. “Alright then sneaky pants, what’s the plan?”

* * *

Cortexia opened her eyes. She found herself in a cave, next to a campfire. She then saw Blackout, sitting in the corner, repairing his armor. She jerked back in fright and held out her hands but to no avail.

“I’ve inhibited your powers.” He said. “Ironically using the collar you put on me.” She felt her neck and indeed was restrained by a metal power-inhibiting collar.

“Why am I alive?” She asked.

“Collateral. In case your friends try to stop me.” Blackout replied.

“How did you escape?”

“I’ve got a Signal. It was cloaked.”

“Okay. So now you have your broken armor and me as a captive. What’s the rest of your grand plan?” He held up Cortexia’s earpiece.

“I’m going to give Jeff my coordinates and have him portal me out of here. Then I will kill him for his betrayal. You will all be left here to die.”

“Then what?”

He looked at her.

“Excuse me?”

“Then what? Your quest is at an end.”

“Not until he’s dead.” Blackout stated.

“You mean the version of Josh you spent years hunting? Travelling through dimensions, killing innocent versions of Joshua Westbrook everywhere, only in the end to discover that it was you the entire time.” Blackout slammed the wall.

“I will not become him!” He shouted. “He ruined my life… took Eileen from me…”

“You’ve learned nothing, have you?” Cortexia asked. “He only did that because of his, your, obsession. He became so blinded by his mission of slaughter and carnage that he didn’t even realize he became the very thing he was trying to destroy. If you truly wish not to become him, then end this.”

“There is no end… He’s still alive…”

“He’s in the Zero Dimension, you’ll never see him again.”

“That’s not good enough!” He shouted. He stood and marched to the mouth of the cave. “I can’t rest until he’s defeated. My entire purpose was to find him. I don’t not become him by giving up. I do it by making sure he’s gone. Forever. If I collect the rest of his Infinity Stones, then maybe…”

“Whatever you’re thinking, he probably tried it.” Cortexia said. “He is you, after all.” Blackout turned and pointed at her.

“Say it again, and I’ll kill you.” He threatened. Cortexia shook her head in shame.

“You have Joshua Westbrook’s face, but not one semblance of his heroism.”

“That died with Eileen.”

“She’s not dead, and perhaps Charlie and his friends can save her, but would she really be proud of what you’ve done? What you are? What you still may be?”

“AAAAHHHHH!” Blackout choked Cortexia, lifted her from the ground and slammed her against the rock wall.

“You don’t… ack…” She gasped. “Have to fight… ach… anymore….” Blackout tightened his grip.

“If I don’t, then no one will.” Suddenly he heard a crack. And the collar fell to the ground in two pieces. “Oh sh-” Cortexia blasted him with burst of her purple aura and he launched out of the cave.

“Gaahhhh!” She gasped, regaining her breath. She scooped up her earpiece and hurried out of the cave.

“Portal? Are you there? Can you hear me?”

“Loud and clear Princess!” He greeted. “I’m glad you’re okay. Listen, I need your dimensional coordinates so I can port you out.”

“Not here.” She said. “We’re still in a dead zone, and Blackout is too close. We can’t let him get back through.” She skidded the corner and began to push her way through the thorns.

“NOW!” Julian shouted, as he, Charlie, and Leviathan all pounced on top of her.

“Aiee!” She shrieked, blasting them all back with her aura.

“Ow.” Charlie groaned.

“Charlie!?” She exclaimed. “Julian? Leviathan? What… why did you attack me!”

“We thought you were Blackout!” Leviathan said.

“Do I look like a 7-foot-tall menace in death armor!?” She cried.

“Sorry, your majesty.” Julian apologized.

“Not as sorry as you’re about to be.” They all turned and found themselves face to face with Blackout. Cortexia looked to him sympathetically.

“I meant what I said.” She tried to reason. “Your fight is over. The Infinite Josh is gone. Come with us, repent at the Spire, please. You may yet find peace.”

“There is no peace for people like me.” Blackout growled. “There is no end… there is only the next fight. The next mission. The next kill.” Cortexia fought back tears.

“I am truly sorry that you have become this lost.” She powered up her hands with her aura. Leviathan gathered ice, Julian powered on his Repulsor Blaster, and Charlie activated his gauntlets.

“We beat this guy once,” Charlie said. “Doing it again shouldn’t be that hard.”

“One final battle against Blackout to save the Multiverse?” Julian said. “Yeah, sounds like fun!”

“Let’s stop him, and finally bring some peace to all the dimensions.” Leviathan stated.

“DIE!” Blackout charged forward, activating red energy within his armor. Cortexia fired her aura blast, Leviathan a stream of ice, Julian a Replusor blast on ‘suicide’, and Charlie lasers from his gauntlets. The energies all collided with Blackout, stopping him short.

“No….. NOOOOOOO!!!!” He screamed. The *BOOM*!

Blackout tumbled across the ground, steaming, his armor in pieces, defeated. They all looked at each other.

“That was… anticlimactic.” Charlie stated.

“You think after all that buildup there’d be a little more to it.” Leviathan complained.

“He’s broken on the inside.” Cortexia observed. She knelt down next to him, and touched his cheek. “A lost soul. He’s only fighting now because it’s all he knows. We must get him to the Spire. There, his pain will end.”

“After all the pain he caused, I’m not sure I want it to.” Julian scoffed.

“You don’t mean that dude.” Charlie said.

“I’m just sayin’, guy was wiping out people in as many dimensions as he could get to. Just don’t feel like justice, lockin’ him up.”

“You want us to kill him?” Leviathan asked in disgust.

“No! Nothin’ like that, I just… shoot man, I don’t know. I just feel like he’s gettin’ off easy.”

“The torment he’ll put himself through knowing that he’s the cause of all of his own problems is enough.” Cortexia said. “Now come on. Portal can’t get us out here, so we’ll have to make the rest of the journey on foot.”

“That sounds very dangerous.” Portal chimed in. “I can send another transport, it’ll take a while to reach you guys, but I can’t let you trek that place out in the open.”

“We haven’t got the time.” Cortexia said.

“And why not?” Julian asked. Cortexia pointed to the distant, to a menacing lightning storm.

“That storm is closing in. Once per 72 hours it engulfs the planet, and eviscerates any living thing not native to this land. The Spire is in the eye of this storm.”

“So… if we don’t beat this storm to the Spire…” Charlie said.

“We will perish.”

“Okay…” Leviathan said. “You were not kidding when you said this prison dimension is inescapable. Guess we’d better get to walking. I know a little bit about wilderness survival.”

“We know bud.” Charlie said, patting his shoulder. He activated his holo-screen. “E.I.L.E.E.N., activate suspension matrix.”

“As you wish, Charlie.” E.I.L.E.E.N. replied. Charlie fired out a forcefield which caught Blackout within it and began levitating him close behind them.

“Let us be off then.” Cortexia said, leading the way, as everyone else followed.

* * *

“So you’re not Westbrook’s *actual* son?” Julian asked Charlie, after they’d been walking for a while.

“Nope, a clone, raised by my mom, Acacia. But that one version of Josh seems to be happy to have a son, and honestly, it’s nice to have a father.”

“Psh, crazy man.” Julian replied. “You know, Blackout is pretty par for the course for me, since my version of Josh is evil. But after what I just went through, it seems like that’s the exception. Most of the Josh’s we met are heroes, and apparently Scramble is a villain.”

“Yep, that seems to be the norm.” Leviathan said.

“Lame.” Julian complained. “It’s just a little hard to believe that I’m the bad guy in most cases.”

“Good and bad, no one can truly claim to be one or the other.” Cortexia said. “Blackout for instance, murdered across the multiverse, but did it in the name of love.”

“Why do you keep on defendin’ this dude?” Julian asked.

“I am sorry, it’s just that Joshua Westbrook was the greatest hero in the world where I am from, I have to believe that he is inherently good, no matter what path he may take.”

“I think the death and destruction in his wake says otherwise Princess.” Leviathan replied. “Where I’m from, he’d be a perfect candidate to become an agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.”

“What’s S.H.I.E.L.D?” Charlie asked.

“Bad dudes.” Julian replied. “Though from what I gather, since my universe is topsy-turvey…”

“Yes, historically S.H.I.E.L.D. are the good guys.” Cortexia replied.

“That’s what that other Josh was trying to say.” Leviathan replied. “Then he brought the entire dang organization over to my dimension, so…”

“Now wait, which Josh is this?” Charlie asked.

“I’m pretty sure it’s the one who’s future becomes your present.” Julian said. “From what I gathered.”

“… That means my father, my actual father, is alive!” He pointed to Leviathan. “In your dimension!”

“Um… yes? I guess… This is getting really hard to follow.”

“Power reserves depleted.” E.I.L.E.E.N. said.

“Wait, what?” Charlie asked. The suspension matrix dropped, and Blackout tumbled out, got to his feet, and got Julian in a chokehold.

“For real man?” Julian groaned.

“I’m getting out of this cursed dimension!” Blackout exclaimed. “Follow me, and he dies!” He pulled Julian along and rushed into the thorns.

“No. Wait. Come back.” Charlie unenthusiastically said.

“You don’t seem to be in a rush to save Julian.” Leviathan noted.

“Well we took him out in like, 3 seconds last time, so…” He looked around. “Where’s Cortexia?” There was flash of purple light from the thorns, followed by a scream. Moments later Cortexia and Julian emerged, Blackout restrained in hi-tech handcuffs.

“Had a pair of E.G.G. Bracers on me.” Julian said. “Thanks for the help by the way you two.”

“Tex had it handled.” Charlie said.

“No.” Cortexia rejected.

“Corey?”

“Cortexia is fine.”

“Okay, sorry.”

“When I get free, I’ll tear you all limb from limb.” Blackout growled. Julian sighed.

“Man, get movin’.” He ordered, and they all continued to walk.

* * *

“And after I tear your mother’s heart from her chest, I’ll feast upon it as you watch, and scream in agony.” Blackout fumed.

“Is that right?” Charlie asked, uninterested.

“And you.” He said to Leviathan. “I will return to your dimension, I will find that arrogant version of Joshua Westbrook, and I’ll separate his head from his body.”

“For the love of…” Leviathan groaned. “Do you ever stop?”

“Not when I’m awake.” Blackout said. Suddenly he spun around and slammed the cuffs on a red flower, which spurted out acid and melted them off. He kicked Charlie in the leg and got him in a chokehold.

“Follow me, and he dies.” He threatened, dragging Charlie off.

“Seirouslyyyyyy!” Charlie cried as they vanished into the thorns. Leviathan sighed.

“I’ll get him.” He said, following after them. Julian and Cortexia stood around for a bit.

“So…” Julian said. “Is there a… Mister Princess Cortexia?”

“Julian, that is highly inappropriate to ask a princess.” Cortexia replied, smirking.

“Alright, alright, my bad.” Julian replied. The was a blue blast of light, and soon Charlie and Leviathan pushed Blackout out in an ice cube.

“He will be impossible to transport like this.” Cortexia pointed out.

“No, look, we can just slide him along.” Leviathan said, scooting him back and forth. Cortexia sighed.

“Very well.” They kept on their path.

* * *

“Is the storm getting closer?” Charlie asked, looking back.

“Yes, I’m afraid that while we grow weary, the storm does not.” Cortexia replied. Julian looked at the ice cube.

“Hey man,” he said to Leviathan. “You might wanna refreeze this, it’s gettin’ kinda…” Just then Blackout burst out, grabbed Leviathan, and ran into the thorns.

“Do not even think about stopping me or your friend dies!” He called back.

“Rock, paper, scissors for it?” Julian asked.

“What’s that?” Charlie inquired.

“It’s like a… nose goes game, you ain’t got rock, paper, scissors?”

“Not in 2099.”

“Ahhhhh!” Blackout screamed, running back through the thorns, being pursued by a lizard. Julian fired his Repulsor Blaster at the lizard, as Cortexia stuck out her foot, causing Blackout to trip, hit his head, and fall unconscious.

“Back! Back I said!” Julian shouted, as the lizard hissed and scurried off. Leviathan emerged soon.

“I’m really getting sick of this guy.” He said.

“How do we transport him now?” Julian asked.

* * *

Charlie and Leviathan both dragged Blackout by a leg behind them, as they continued forward.

“I got a reading coming up!” Portal exclaimed. “Spire dead ahead!”

“Finally!” Julian said. They heard the crack of lightning.

“And not a moment too soon.” Cortexia said. “The storm is nearly upon us!” They made it out of the maze of thorns and into a clearing, where a towering black spire stood to the sky, surrounded by a blue energy barrier.

“Once we are within the barrier, we are safe.” Cortexia stated. Suddenly Blackout pulled his legs free and sprung to his feet.

“Come on man! Give it up!” Julian complained.

“I will not spend the rest of my days locked away when I have not completed my mission!”

“That storm is going to kill us.” Leviathan said. “Don’t be stupid, let’s go.” Blackout assumed a fighting stance.

“Fine.” Charlie growled. He ran forward and swung but Blackout caught him, reversed it, and slammed him into the ground.

“Ow!” He cried. Leviathan fired ice, but Blackout activated a shield and blocked the stream. Cortexia fired her aura, but Blackout ducked it and punched her.

“Agh!” She winced. Julian aimed his Repulsor Blaster, but it crapped out.

“To shell with this!” He threw it and came at Blackout, but he blocked every attack and threw Julian into Leviathan before he could fire another ice blast. Charlie charged forward.

“Give up!” He yelled. Blackout caught his wrist and pulled his gauntlet off, then knocked Charlie to the ground. He put the gauntlet on and powered it up with his armor energy, then fired a suspension matrix, trapping Charlie, Julian, and Leviathan.

“No!” Cortexia cried.

“Come here!” Blackout yelled, choking her. He slammed her into the ground and punched her.

“Ah!” She shrieked. He repeatedly punched her, again, and again, and again. He stood up, Cortexia lying bloodied on the ground. He breathed heavily, and looked to the Spire.

“I will free every prisoner, and they will serve me, as I travel the Multiverse, and destroy ALL JOSHUA WESTBROOKS! Hahahahahahahahaha!!!!!!!” Thunder and lightning clashed. He looked back, the storm closing in.

“Guys! No!” Portal cried. “Come on! The Spire is feet away! Don’t let it end like this! Guys!”

“Have a nice life.” Blackout said, Leviathan, Charlie, and Julian helpless to do anything within the matrix. He walked towards the Spire.

“Joshua…” He stopped. He looked back, as Cortexia weakly got to her hands and knees. “Don’t become… what you swore to destroy…”

“Quod sum eris.” He heard Infinite Josh say. He looked at his reflection in a puddle of water. As lightning clashed, he saw the reflection of Infinite Josh, and no longer his own. *“I am what you will be.”*

“This is the choice you have to make.” Cortexia pleaded. “Continue the violence, and trap yourself in the loop, or be greater than fate. Forge your own destiny. And be the hero that Joshua Westbrook can be. That Eileen believes you are.”

Blackout looked back at her. He looked towards the Spire. Tears began to fall.

“I’m not a hero.” He whimpered. Cortexia stood, walked over, and hugged him. He grasped her tightly. “What have I done in Eileen’s name? How did I become… this broken?”

“You’ve been alone, all this time. But you don’t have to be. Not anymore.” Cortexia touched his cheek. “Think back, to when it was you, Eileen, Acacia, and E.G.G. Pure, and bright.”

“I’ll never have that again.” He said. “I guess… I never truly accepted that.” He tapped the gauntlet and let down the matrix.

“Run!” Leviathan cried, as they took off, the storm licking at their heels. Cortexia grabbed Blackout’s hand and pulled, but he didn’t move.

“Joshua, come on!” She said.

“No.” He picked her up and threw her. She hit the other three and they all tumbled into the energy barrier.

“No!” She cried, running forward.

“Cortexia stop!” Portal pleaded.

“You ain’t gonna make it!” Julian cried, as he Charlie and Leviathan grabbed her.

“I’m sorry.” Leviathan said. “You can’t save him.” She looked at him, tears in her eyes.

“Joshua.” She said. He looked back at her.

“If he truly is me, you haven’t seen the last of him.” Blackout warned. “He is determined, and he will not stop until he finds vengeance.”

“But there’s still hope for you.” She said.

“Maybe once.” Blackout smiled, and looked up at the storm. “When you fix Eileen, tell I love her. And tell her… I’m sorry.”

“Is this what you want?” Charlie asked.

“No.” Blackout replied. He opened his arms. “But it’s what I need to do. I’m not that Infinity Stone wielding monster from the future, and I am Blackout no longer.” The storm thundered towards him, as a tear fell from his face.

“My name is Joshua Daniel Westbrook! And this is my choice!” He turned to the heroes. “Thank you, for setting me free.” The storm washed over him, and Joshua was gone, noting but the shattered armor of his former self left behind. Cortexia placed her hand on the barrier.

“You are welcome.”

* * *

A gateway opened into Blackout’s Lab, and Cortexia, Leviathan, Julian, and Charlie walked through.

“Welcome back.” Portal said. “I’m glad you’re all okay.”

“It’s crazy it went down like that.” Julian said.

“Yeah, it’s hard to believe he’s gone.” Portal said. “I mean, he had me chained to a wall and tortured for years, but I knew him before that, and… man, he’s really gone.”

“Blackout did a great many terrible things.” Cortexia said. “The state he left some dimensions in is… unforgivable. But in the end, he realized the error of his ways, and to prevent himself from becoming something worse, he did the right thing.”

“You’re not wrong.” Portal said. He opened his hands and expanded a map of worlds across the Multiverse. One of them slowly faded away. “This was the branch reality where Blackout became Infinite Josh. He killed you all, took the Spire, and continued his tirade across dimensions.”

“What’s different I wonder?” Leviathan asked.

“Easy.” Julian said. “Our guy decided to the right thing. He got to be a hero one more time.”

“Infinite Josh will still exist though.” Charlie said. “He told us he transcended time and space.”

“And even though we’ve trapped him in the Zero Dimension, Blackout’s warning rings in my head.” Cortexia added.

“We’ll be here.” Portal said. “I’ll fix this place up, and we can meet here whenever the Multiverse needs you four again.”

“Sounds legit.” Julian said. “I appreciate y’all. We’ll keep in touch. Now Portal, if you don’t mind, my friends probably need help with Joshinator and his crew.”

“Yeah, and I’m ready more than ever to help heal this dimension’s Eileen.” Charlie said.

“And I’ve got to get this armor to Hank.” Leviathan said, holding Blackout’s armor. “Should be a fitting apology for wrecking his lab.”

“Then be off, heroes.” Cortexia dismissed, as Portal opened gateways all around the room. “And when calls the Multiverse, the All-New, All-Different E.G.G. will organize once more, to protect it at all costs.”

The Beginning